

USDA Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman Visits Charleston

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman visited Charleston April 19 to announce West Virginia's participation in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). CREP will safeguard 4,160 acres of watershed across the Mountain State by offering rental payments to farmers who institute conservation measures on their land. Secretary Veneman and Governor Bob Wise signed an agreement at the University of Charleston's Rigglesman Hall in the second-floor rotunda at 9 a.m.

Speakers included Second District Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito; Gerald Miller, President of the West Virginia Association of Conservation Districts; and Lance Tabor, West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA) Executive Director. West Virginia Department of Agriculture's (WVDA) Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass served as master of ceremonies for the event. As partners in CREP, representatives from the West Virginia Division of Forestry, Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service and USDA Farm Service Agency also attended the ceremony.

"We were very pleased to have secretary Veneman visiting West Virginia," said Commissioner Douglass. "This program shows how the state and federal governments can work with farmers at the local level to achieve mutual goals."

The West Virginia CREP will pay producers to remove from agricultural production land in the Potomac, New, Greenbrier and Little Kanawha River basin. The Program will reimburse, through incentives and cost shares, producers for planting riparian buffers, filter strips, trees and grasses that keep pollutants from entering the watersheds.

The total cost of the Program is expected to reach \$11.4 million over the next year. Of that amount, \$8.2 million will come from USDA and \$3.2 million from the State. USDA will also offer technical assistance to ensure long-term protection of the watersheds.